

CONSERVATION OF LIFE

Public Health, Housing
and Town Planning

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JULY, 1919

Commission of Conservation
Canada



CANADA'S POST-WAR HOUSING PROGRESS

Although Canada had no war housing policy, such as that which was adopted in England and the United States, it has inaugurated a post-war housing policy which is likely to have far-reaching effects on the industrial and social development of the country.

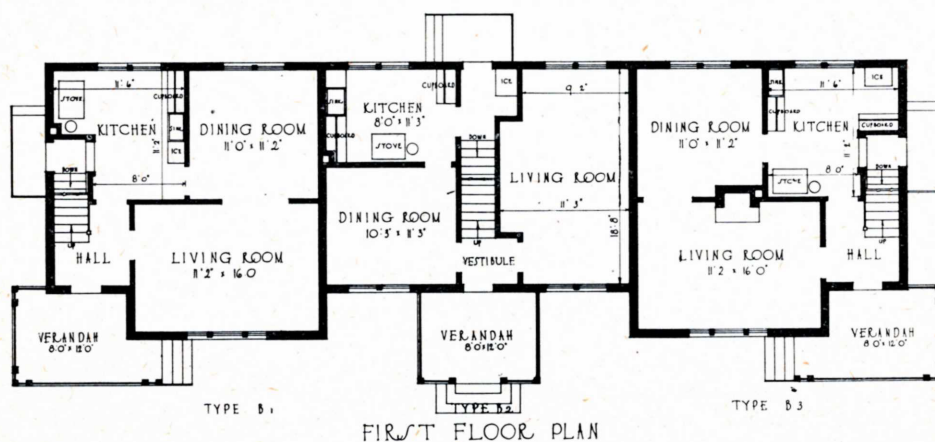
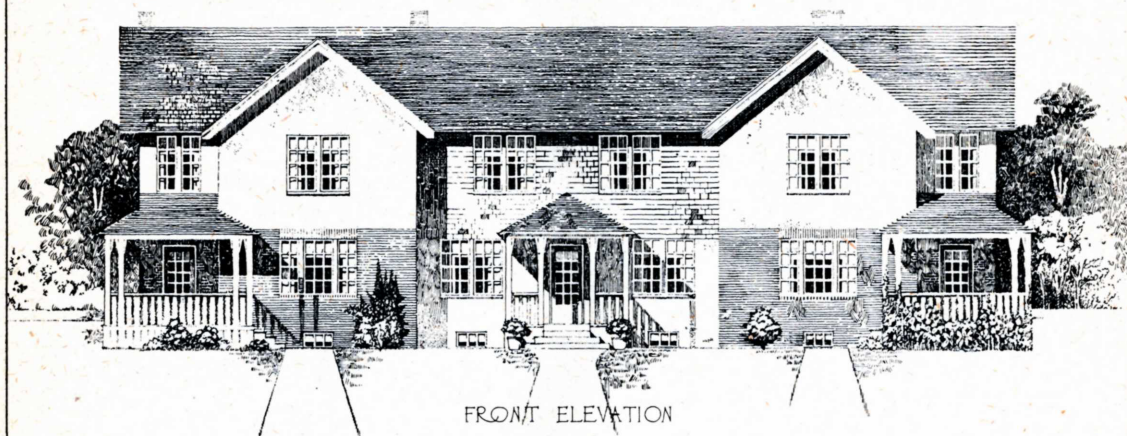
HOUSING AS A PART OF RECONSTRUCTION

The building of homes is incidental to the development of industry. Improvement is needed in two directions: first, to raise the standards of existing dwellings and, second, to build new houses according to better standards than those which have prevailed in the past. We have to begin in Canada, as in all other countries, by recognising that neglect of housing conditions has been probably the chief weakness of our social organization in modern civilized nations. With the growth of manufacture and the consequent expansion of cities into larger aggregations of population, together with the increased subdivision of labour, there have arisen numerous evils which the war has helped to reveal to us in their true proportions.

One of our troubles has been that we have been easily persuaded to act in relation to a number of these problems as if the only true guide was experience of similar conditions in the past, without recognizing that such a guide is not reliable by itself in dealing with conditions that never have existed in their present form. There is no precedent for the modern city, and there is no existing city which is a precedent for those who will have to deal with the changing conditions of 20 years hence. It is not merely a matter of difference of local conditions, of changes in forms of transportation and custom; it is also a matter, in regard to the largest cities at least, of expansion beyond anything hitherto dreamed of, much less experienced. Some of the greatest cities are growing beyond the size, in matter of population, of what has hitherto been regarded as great states.

In Canada we follow at some distance behind England and the United States in the matter of size of our biggest cities and we may benefit, therefore, from the result of past experience. One of the benefits is the lesson that reliance upon mere experience without the assistance of science and imagination is a fatal thing. It is a lesson that we are very slow to learn. The war has shaken us up a bit and made us realize the importance of these problems and so it has come about that men are beginning to regard increased production and economic efficiency instead of mere cheapness for cheapness' sake in relation to labour. One of the first necessities to obtain efficiency is the improvement of housing conditions.

Perhaps, however, we can hardly pride ourselves on having attained the position of introducing a housing policy solely because we have become more far-seeing and enlightened in our methods. To some



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extent, and perhaps to the greatest extent, the cause of action has sprung from the shortage of dwellings due to war conditions, the need for provision being made for employing surplus labour, and the desire to assist in avoiding industrial unrest. Even, however, if we regard these things as the most pressing causes of action there is no gainsaying the fact that a very considerable element in promoting action has been the recognition apart from war conditions of the general need for housing improvement and better social standards in Canada.

Housing in England and the United States during the war was to some extent guided by military needs, even if it was carried out in an enlightened way. The housing policy being promoted in Canada as a reconstruction policy, is likely to be of more social advantage to us as a community because its chief stimulus must come from the desire to improve social conditions. In other words we are spending our money and effort on housing improvement not for the purposes of defence but for purposes of development. This does not mean that war housing in other countries has not taught us valuable lessons, but it means that we are entering upon a different field which, if rightly cultivated, should yield us better results than war housing.

THE CANADIAN POLICY ON THE RIGHT LINES

While Canada has not any war housing to its credit, its policy in connection with post-war housing seems to be on the right lines. Leaving out of consideration whatever merits we may see in it ourselves, we may mention the comments of two well-informed observers.

Mr. C. Stanley Taylor, Project Engineer for the firm of Mann and MacNeille, New York, who were advisers to the U.S. Government on many of their housing projects writes:

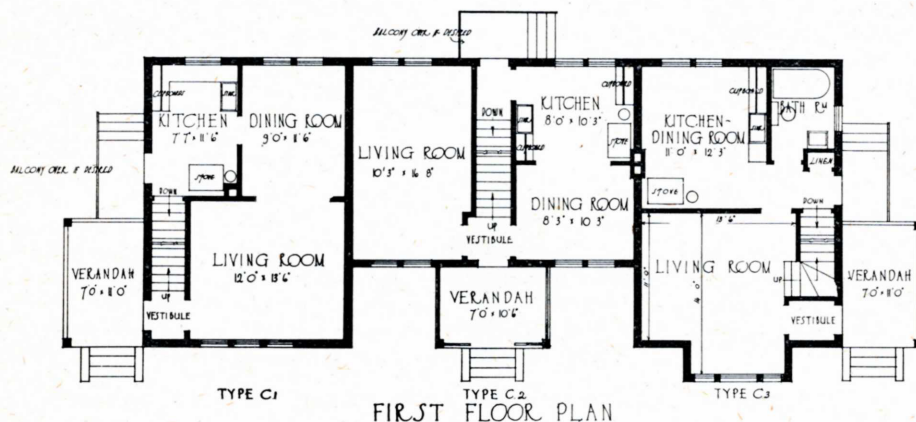
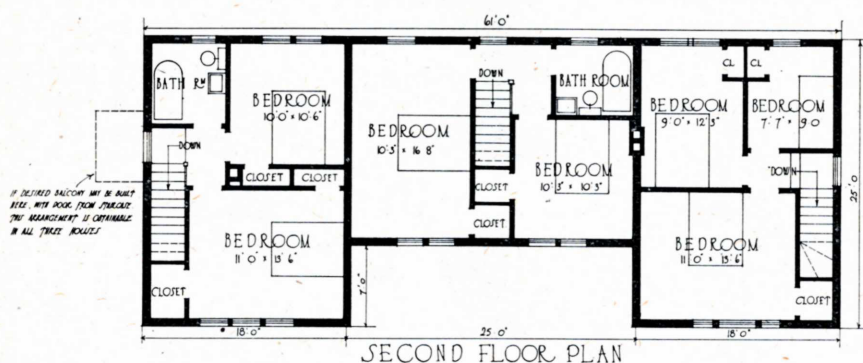
"We wish to express our unqualified admiration for the completeness, practicability and simplicity of the administration methods outlined in the data received from you. We believe this to be the most practicable step toward the provision of good housing by Federal co-operation which has yet been taken in any country."

Mr. Horsburgh Campbell, M. Inst. C.E., City Engineer of Edinburgh, states that the Canadian project is on sounder economic lines than the proposed housing schemes in Britain.

VALUE OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS

The evidence of merit of the Canadian Housing Scheme is, however, to be obtained chiefly from the fact that it is proving a workable measure of co-operation between the Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments.

Only three months after the Armistice, the Federal housing project was passed by Order in Council, after having been approved of by the Dominion and Provincial Governments, for general application throughout the whole Dominion. In that scheme there was not only provided an appropriation of \$25,000,000 but all the conditions, principles and standards that were considered desirable to lay down or recommend, for regulating the expenditure of the money in the proper way were included. On the same date that the Federal scheme was approved, viz., the 20th February, 1919, the general housing scheme for the province of Ontario, which had been prepared in accordance with the Federal scheme, was approved by the Governor in Council. Since then schemes have been approved for Quebec, Manitoba and British



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Columbia. Draft schemes have also been drawn up for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, thus leaving only two provinces which have not prepared or submitted schemes, namely, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

To show the progress that has been made by the municipalities under one scheme, a recent report of the Director of Housing for Ontario shows that 47 municipalities have passed by-laws to come under the provisions of the Ontario Housing Act.

The Director estimates that the loans required by those municipalities will aggregate about \$8,000,000. Plans and specifications have been forwarded to him for approval from about ten of the above-mentioned municipalities. In several of these places the construction of houses under the Act has been commenced.

One half of the cities in Ontario have come under the provisions of the Act.

From the information in the director's hands, he anticipates that over sixty municipalities will be actively engaged in the construction of houses under the Act, during the summer. A number of them are making plans for acquiring land and erecting houses on a large scale.

The progress in setting up machinery to deal with housing has also been considerable. Dr. Nadeau has been appointed as Director of Housing for Quebec, and Mr. J. A. Ellis for Ontario, and special officials have been assigned the duty of supervising housing development in other provinces.

Under the Federal Order in Council of 12th December, 1918, the Housing Committee of the Cabinet was recommended to obtain the assistance of the Town Planning Adviser of the Commission of Conservation. Since the above date a small Federal Bureau has been temporarily set up, attached to both the Housing Committee of the Cabinet and the Commission of Conservation, to deal with the matters which come under Federal regulations and carry out the work of research and preparation of model plans, which it is considered desirable to have done in the Federal office.

The Federal office will deal mostly with the giving of advice, and in that respect it is already fully employed. Model plans such as those shown on pages 51 and 53 will be distributed to the different provinces and to municipalities that make a request for them. Information will be collected regarding standardization of materials, costs data, etc. All this work will be carried on, although necessarily in a small way for the present, at the same time as the promotion of town planning legislation and schemes.

CHARACTER AND CONTENTS OF HOUSING SCHEMES

The above indication of the progress that has been made during the past five or six months needs, if we are to realize the importance of that progress, to be supplemented by some description of what a housing scheme is. The Federal scheme, dated February 20th, only lays down four conditions. These may be summarized as follows:—

1. A general housing scheme has to be prepared by each province and submitted for the approval of the Federal Government. This general scheme will set out the standards and conditions to be complied with in local housing schemes. Once the general scheme for the province is approved by the Federal Government the jurisdiction in respect of local schemes will rest with the provincial authorities.

2. The maximum amount that may be loaned per dwelling shall not exceed, for different sizes and types of dwellings, inclusive of land, etc., the respective sums of \$3,000, \$3,500, \$4,000, and \$4,500.
3. Loans for building houses and purchasing land may be granted only to Provincial Governments, Municipalities, Housing Societies with limited dividends, and owners of lots for the purpose of erecting houses for their own occupancy.
4. The loans shall be repayable over a period of 20 or, in special cases, of 30 years.

In addition to the above four conditions, general recommendations are made dealing with the following matters:

1. Acquisition of sites, etc.
2. Planning of sites, etc.
3. Loans for separate or individual houses.
4. Limit of income of persons to be provided with dwellings.
5. Construction of local improvements to precede occupation of dwellings.
6. Reservation of sites for playgrounds, etc.
7. Loans to be used for purchasing and developing land and erecting dwellings.
8. Proportion of cost of land to dwelling.
9. Recommendations as to minimum standards in regard to sites.
10. Recommendations as to minimum standards in houses.
11. Legal and other costs.
12. Compliance with general scheme, etc.

With regard to these matters it is recommended that land be acquired at its cost by a cheap and speedy method and without regard to speculative value; that sites, as well as houses, should be properly planned; that one acre in every 10 should be reserved for playgrounds; that water supply and sewerage should be provided in advance of building; that not more than one-tenth of the cost of a house should be spent on the bare site and that proper minimum standards of construction, air space, size of rooms, etc., should be provided in or surrounding the actual building.

The unique part of this legislation in regard to its general principles is the introduction of town planning as an essential part of housing. Indirectly there is also an effort made to encourage durable and permanent, in preference to temporary, construction, so as to assist in dealing with unsatisfactory fire risks.

As a whole, however, the outstanding and, to some extent, remarkable feature of the scheme in Canada is the extent to which it both co-ordinates and splits up the responsibilities of the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Governments. It is certain that if the scheme succeeds on the present co-operative basis, it will not only be of immense value to the country, but have considerable influence on the measures adopted by other countries. The hesitation in following this method of Government co-operation in the United States is undoubtedly due, in part at least, to a lack of faith in its practicability. There is no misgiving as to its soundness in principle among those who have commented on proposed measures of Federal and State co-operation in such matters. Canada has the opportunity, however, of proving that the principle of such co-operation is not only sound, but that it is practical and efficient in practice.

Of necessity, such a scheme involves that the final responsibility for actual building and financing of housing schemes will rest with the municipality. It cannot be otherwise, unless there is Federal or Provincial interference with municipal control, which would not be acceptable under Canadian conditions. Whatever danger there may be of the housing project in Canada not achieving success will be due to indifference or fear of facing loss on the part of the municipalities. As our municipalities show an inclination to do their duty, we may well hope that no such danger will arise.—*T.A.*
